United Nations A/S-19/PV.10

General Assembly

Official Records

Nineteenth Special Session

10th plenary meeting
Friday, 27 June 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail . . . . . (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

The Acting President: I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abou Demba Sow, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania.

Mr. Abou Demba Sow, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Sow (Mauritania) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I convey to the General Assembly the best wishes of the President of the Republic of Mauritania for the success of this special session devoted to the important topic of sustainable development.

I congratulate Ambassador Razali on the effective manner in which he has been presiding over the work of the Assembly, and pay tribute to the Commission on Sustainable Development and its Chairman, Mr. Tolba, and to the United Nations Environment Programme. Our special thanks go to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to the Secretariat staff for the excellent way in which they have organized this important international gathering.

Mankind will remember the end of the twentieth century as a time when a number of key issues were addressed, including the rational utilization of natural resources and the overall study of the relationship between man and the environment with a view to ensuring the rational, sustainable utilization of our resources. There is no doubt that the 1992 Rio summit was a major international meeting on environment and development. Now that five years have passed since Rio, it is important that we take stock of the progress we have made in implementing the outcomes of that conference.

Even if post-Rio activities have been oriented towards sustainable development and even if some of them have been successful, it is important that we acknowledge that in many poor countries the state of the environment has not improved; rather, it continues to deteriorate. Here, we have yet to conquer the improper utilization of natural resources and the persistence of poverty, which run counter to the criteria for sustainable development.

Mauritania's development problems are specific and include continued desertification, with its harmful effect on the population. This clearly testifies to the link that must exist between environment and development. Mauritania is fully aware of this reality and was an active participant in the preparations for the Rio summit; we have moreover done a great deal to implement its decisions. We have undertaken important measures under Agenda 21, despite the lack of available resources. Mauritania also participated in the preparatory work on

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the Convention to Combat Desertification. We have endeavoured to adopt a long-term master plan to restore environmental balance with a view to achieving self-sufficiency in food for our people. We participate in the formulation and implementation of regional programmes for the Maghreb and the Sahel.

In the area of climate change, we are currently engaged in cooperative efforts with international organizations to prepare a study on climate change and its relationship to desertification in our country. In that context, the Mauritanian Government is implementing programmes related to new and renewable resources.

We have adopted a national strategy on biological diversity. In 1993, we reviewed the regulations for the Banc d'Arguin National Park, which figures on the World Heritage list compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. We have implemented a rational policy for the utilization of fishery and other sea resources.

Sustainable development is a universal phenomenon based on the relationship between environment strategies and development strategies. That is why we consider activities to combat illiteracy and social marginalization to be major pillars of sustainable development in Mauritania. We seek to involve the entire population in efforts to combat desertification, protect the environment and achieve an environment hospitable to life. That is why, thanks also to political stability, Mauritania has achieved a number of successes in its environmental policies.

Enrolment in schools has gone up, thanks to international investment, grassroots involvement in teacher training and the establishment of the necessary infrastructures.

In the social sector we have also made progress, particularly with regard to the supply of drinking water. Overall poverty has been reduced by 10 per cent.

The international community demonstrated solidarity at the Rio Summit in defining the challenges and dangers it faced. Obstacles still remain in the quest to implement Agenda 21. We have not been able to achieve an agreement over the last five years on financial machinery for the Convention to Combat Desertification. Over 1 billion people are affected by the phenomenon of desertification.

The implementation of Agenda 21 has not been up to the expectations of the developing world, particularly with regard to the transfer of technology.

We should like to appeal for efforts to improve living standards in developing countries so that desertification and pollution can be successfully combated and technology can be transferred under favourable terms. Negotiations must continue without delay in order to achieve concrete results, particularly in the struggle against desertification.

We also appeal for support for the financing of sustainable-development programmes. Developing countries must devote more resources to this cause, and developed countries must also do their part. In this context, the role of non-governmental organizations is extremely important.

In conclusion, I should like to express Mauritania's commitment to implementing the provisions of Agenda 21 in line with its available resources. In this context, we call for greater cooperation and consultation with the relevant international institutions.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania for his statement.

Mr. Abou Demba Sow, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paljor Dorji, Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan.

Mr. Paljor Dorji, Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Dorji (Bhutan): I have the honour to convey to the President of the General Assembly and through him to all representatives, the warm greetings of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan and good wishes for the success of this special session of the General Assembly.

I will be delivering an abridged version of my statement. The full statement will be circulated.

In Rio we all met and made commitments to future generations. The task before us is to assess our

experiences with Agenda 21. We should not dwell on the ills of the global environment, but on the positive measures that we must take to address and confront the challenges ahead of us. Our objectives must be to demonstrate political will and global concern and to transform them into policies and projects at the operational level. Let us learn from each other's experiences, analyse the progress we have made and reaffirm our political commitments. We must leave this session with national obligations and specific policies, measures, projects and programmes to achieve our common goal of sustainable development. The global community must provide financial resources and environmentally sound technology transfer and adhere to the Rio principles of global partnership and common but differentiated responsibility.

My country, Bhutan, has made tremendous strides in the environmental field. We have devoted over 26 per cent of our total land area to an extensive protected-area system, reflecting the strong conservation policy and ethics of our people. Biodiversity conservation and preservation is a national policy of the Royal Government. Therefore, we would like to reaffirm the sovereign right of every State to its biological resources. We believe that the global community must ensure equitable sharing of intellectual property rights and other benefits arising out of the utilization of these resources.

We have also maintained over 72 per cent of the area of the country under forest cover, which serves as a very large carbon sink for the global community. An inventory of greenhouse-gas sources and sinks shows that Bhutan sequesters 19.6 tons of carbon per capita.

We are committed to working towards protecting our climate system. We urge all nations to accelerate negotiations on the text of a legally binding protocol or other legal instrument to be completed in time for the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto.

Although we face many challenges, the Royal Government has stated categorically that it will not resort to unlimited marketing of its natural resources, as such a policy will quickly undermine the country's tradition of conservation and place Bhutan in the same predicament as countries that face severe ecological and environmental problems. The Royal Government has chosen to forgo immediate economic gains and has placed higher priority on the conservation of natural resources and a programme of sustainable development.

We have also been building up global partnerships in the field of environment. One of the most innovative partnerships is the sustainable development agreement with the Governments of the Netherlands, Benin and Costa Rica. This agreement is based on the principle that sustainable development is a joint responsibility of both the North and the South. The Government of Denmark is also generously supporting the Environmental Sector Support Programme in Bhutan. This Programme will focus on environmental legislation, pollution control, hazardous waste and protected-area management. We also greatly appreciate the support for the environment provided by India, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Wildlife Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Asian Development Bank.

Bhutan is also working at the regional level with the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). In the Delhi Declaration, SAARC Environment Ministers reaffirmed that the environment is of common concern and made a commitment to regional cooperation in all spheres of environment and development.

Bhutan realizes that it is a small country and that its effort in the global environment may seem limited. However, we are fully committed to maintaining and preserving one of the last remaining bastions of pristine forests and rich biological diversity in the world for the benefit of all future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan for his statement.

Mr. Paljor Dorji, Deputy Minister of the Environment of Bhutan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Robert Millette, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada.

Mr. Robert Millette, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Millette (Grenada): My Government is committed to the principles enshrined in Agenda 21, and efforts are being made at the national level to ensure that sustainable human and economic development is achieved.

Five years ago small island developing States participated in the Rio Summit. Most of the countries in our region, including my own, have fragile economies and face a constant threat to our marine, agricultural and forest ecosystems. Our vulnerabilities to the threat of hurricanes and the protection of the marine life upon which our economies thrive require active participation on our part and on the part of the international community to ensure the sustainability of our economies and the protection of our environment for future generations.

The Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1994, received assurances that the international community would play a significant role in the process of ensuring that resources, both financial and technical, would be put in place to address issues relating to, among other things, poverty, climate change, natural and man-made hazards, the conservation and protection of our biological diversity and coastal zone management.

Since that Conference, however, the process has been slow. We urge the international community to make resources available to assist small island States, such as my own, in achieving the principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration.

In an effort to address the issue of poverty and poverty eradication, the Government of Grenada, with assistance from the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Inter-Agency Group of Development Organizations, the Government is holding a series of consultations in each parish, including Carriacou and Petite Martinique. The purpose of these consultations is to obtain first-hand information about the causes of poverty and to seek suggestions on what the Government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and communities can do to eradicate poverty. At the end of these consultations, a draft action plan for the eradication of poverty will be prepared and circulated.

The most dangerous agricultural pest, the pink mealy bug, is being controlled by bio-control agents — a hybrid beetle and a parasitic wasp. The results have been astoundingly positive. The mass participation of the population in that approach has contributed significantly to the rehabilitation of fruit production and a reinforcement of the benefits of bio-control approaches to combating agricultural pests, in contrast to the use of agrochemicals.

Deforestation and the degradation of grasslands are also being addressed. A deliberate policy of managing Grenada's forestry with a view to water and soil conservation is being pursued. Reafforestation and grassland management in Carriacou, under the Carriacou Forestry and Management Project, are testimony to that policy.

Through this project, the livelihood of livestock farmers will be enhanced through the rational development and management of grazing pastures. Also, the destruction of crops by stray animals will be minimized. The reafforestation component, in the long run, will improve the water situation in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. In Grenada, there is another forestry management project, funded by the British Development Division and the Government of Grenada.

The recently completed Land Information System Project, with modern geographic information-system technology, was funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and it provides Grenada with a scientific basis for the rational use of its agricultural lands. Currently, the Government is using some of the outputs of that project to better systematize its agricultural land-use policy.

My Government is committed to sustainable human development and, through that process, aims to integrate related policies into national development planning. In the area of tourism, for example, the Government and the private sector have undertaken such projects as the following: the cleaning of the beaches, the Anandale Welcome Centre, the Wobunn Conch Shell Project and the Mount Carmel Falls project, which is an excellent example of community involvement. It is an income-generating project which is linked to the protection of the environment and the conservation and protection of biological diversity. There is also the Sandy Island project in Carriacou, which is aimed at safeguarding the island from further coastal erosion and environmental degradation.

The Protection of Coral Reefs project, is a system of management by the local fishing community of a sufficiently large area, in collaboration with the Government. The Parks and Protected Areas project, an approach being taken between the tourism sector, to promote eco-tourism, and the Agricultural Ministry, is aimed at managing the forest's biodiversity.

In addition, my Government is committed to signing all the international conventions which will safeguard the Caribbean Sea as a pollution-free zone.

Within the last five years, four important international conferences have focused the attention of the international community on issues that are vital to the survival and development of the planet. Here I would like to mention the Earth Summit, held in Rio; the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island States, held in Barbados in 1994; the Summit on the alleviation of poverty which took place in Copenhagen 1995; and this present conference.

One of the aims of the Barbados Conference was to make the ideals of the Rio Conference a reality.

We have heard very promising statements from several Heads of Government from the developed as well as the developing world. It is our hope that this conference will lead to international cooperation, consensus-building and programmes that will result in the reduction of poverty, hunger, the spread of infectious diseases and better living conditions for everyone. But most importantly, the developing and developed countries must invest in programmes and projects aimed at achieving sustainable human development.

During the debate at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, the Prime Minister of Grenada said that the question of environment and sustainable development remains at the heart of our concerns. It is also a central issue for small island developing States in particular and developing countries in general.

If we continue to reaffirm that human beings are the centre of sustainable development and that they have a right to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature, actions must be taken at all levels, and especially at the international level, to facilitate the process, thereby ensuring that developing countries, and particularly small island developing States, are provided with the know-how and the resources to implement the programmes.

The vulnerability of small island States and the threat to our fragile ecosystems were recently demonstrated by the passage of hurricanes Iris, Luis and Marilyn. Our economic viability and sustainable development and growth are at stake. In this regard, Grenada looks forward to the fulfilment of the pledged commitments by developed countries to assist small developing countries in achieving sustainable human development.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Grenada for his statement.

Mr. Robert Millette, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jean Ravou-Akii, Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu.

Mr. Jean Ravou-Akii, Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ravou-Akii (Vanuatu): It is a great honour for me to address this Assembly on this special session on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu.

(spoke in French)

On this important occasion, I wish, on behalf of the people and Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, to reaffirm the full support of the Republic of Vanuatu for the principles and objectives of Agenda 21, adopted as the outcome of the Rio 1992 Earth Summit. This wholehearted support is evident, on the one hand, in its participation in the gradual edification of the new branch of international law known as environmental law and, on the other, in its incorporation of environmental issues into its national education programmes.

Let us first consider the Republic of Vanuatu's participation in the gradual edification of the new branch of international law known as environmental law. The Republic of Vanuatu ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Moreover, it acceded to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and its two amendments. All these international agreements have been integrated into the national laws of the Republic of Vanuatu on environmental protection. Such legislation is based on the provisions of article 7 of the 30 July 1980 Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.

One important element of our national legislation is a 1994 law on forest exploitation within the Republic of Vanuatu, the implementation of which effectively bans the export of timber. This ban was referred to in the book *The State of Food and Agriculture*, published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 1996.

Next, I turn to the incorporation of environmental issues into our national education programmes. In the third National Development Plan of the Republic of Vanuatu, covering the period 1992 to 1996, environmental issues are given pride of place in the national economy sectors, particularly in the training centres that educate future entrepreneurs, such as the Vanuatu National Institute of Technology, which is a bilingual institution.

The book *Sustainable Human Development in the Republic of Vanuatu*, published in 1996 by Direction: Asie-Pacifique with a preface by the United Nations Development Programme, bears witness to the priority which the Government of Vanuatu attaches to education, which it calls the cornerstone of the struggle against poverty.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu for his statement.

Mr. Jean Ravou-Akii, Chairman of the delegation of Vanuatu, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. David Orrukem, Chairman of the delegation of Palau.

Mr. David Orrukem, Chairman of the delegation of Palau, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Orrukem (Palau): It is a great pleasure to address the Assembly today. I want to express my profound gratitude for having been given this opportunity to present the views of the Republic of Palau before this special session of the General Assembly.

The island nation of Palau was not yet an independent country five years ago when the first international Earth Summit convened in Rio de Janeiro. Palau, therefore, was not a Member of the United Nations at that time. Palauans watched and listened as the assembled leaders discussed the protection of the environment, global climate change and sustainable development. We watched and listened carefully, aware that our nation was on the path to political independence. We understood that we would soon be joining the worldwide discussion about these urgent issues.

I speak today, representing the fully independent Republic of Palau, the newest State Member of the United Nations. Palau is an archipelago of extraordinary natural beauty. Anyone who spends a day among Palau's beautiful Rock Islands recognizes the importance of protecting our earth, air and water. We Palauans want to share our islands' astonishing beauty with visitors from around the world. To accomplish this, we must continue to develop. We must continue to strengthen our infrastructure to support our visitors. But we must continue to be very careful.

The Republic of Palau is striving for sustainable development that will not blight our land or pollute our air and water. In Palau, we recognize and realize that we must protect, not exploit, our natural resources.

The Republic of Palau is blessed by a clean environment. We have clean air that has blown across hundreds of kilometres of ocean. We have clean water that has not been polluted by the people or factories of a large metropolitan area. In many ways, we are very lucky that we live in one of the cleanest places on Earth. But the Republic of Palau cannot afford to be complacent. We face an immediate and critical problem in our islands from the impacts of global climate change.

Man is responsible for the changes in the Earth's climate. It is our automobiles, our jets, our factories and our air conditioners that emit pollutants such as carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere. We are dirtying our air. We are destroying the layer of ozone in our atmosphere that protects us from the ravages of excessive heat and light from the Sun.

Many scientists believe that average global air temperatures could rise as much as five degrees Celsius over the next century because of the pollutants emitted into our atmosphere. Increased air temperatures could prompt rapid melting in the polar ice caps that, in turn, could cause water levels to rise significantly in the world's oceans. Some predict a 1-metre rise in water levels within the next 100 years. When oceans rise, islands are in peril. This is as true for Palau as it is for Manhattan. Some islands will simply suffer more catastrophic damage. The rapid submersion of our island masses will cause untold grief for our nation. Homes will be destroyed. People will have to relocate. A way of life will be gone.

Palau stands in solidarity with its neighbour islands in the Pacific, which also face this peril. The ocean that surrounds us sustains us. But the ocean which sustains us also has the power to destroy us. We must do all that we can to turn back the tide. We must work in solidarity with the world community to address the issue of global climate change.

Rising sea levels will profoundly affect places as different as Madagascar and Amsterdam, Vanuatu and Venice.

I commend the efforts of those who attended the Earth Summit in Rio five years ago, and urge the Assembly to move forward quickly on Agenda 21. We must strive for environmental interdependence, recognizing the dangers that we pose to the Earth. We must devise and implement strategies for successful, sustainable development. And together we must preserve our natural environment.

Finally, we must continue to promote environmental education. Our children are our greatest natural resource. In Palau we try to teach our young people that they have the duty to preserve the natural beauty of our nation. They are the ones who will face the environmental challenges that will confront Palau in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the Delegation of Palau for his statement.

Mr. David Orrukem, Chairman of the Delegation of Palau, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See.

Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, was escorted to the rostrum.

Archbishop Tauran (Holy See) (*interpretation from French*): Those who have spoken during these last days have proven the extent to which the concepts of an environment worthy of human beings and of sustainable development, both of which were elaborated at the Rio Summit in 1992, have become part of our way of thinking. The Holy See is pleased to note this, since the Catholic Church has always believed that the cause of the environment is the cause of the human person, who is at the same time both spiritual and material, the guardian and the consumer of natural resources and of what is produced by our intelligence and technical abilities.

To speak of forests, water resources, pollution of the air, water or soil, and human settlements, is to reflect upon living conditions and the survival of the whole of humankind. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development said nothing less when it specified that

> "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." (*A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), annex I, Principle 1*)

That is why I am pleased to find these aspects present in the draft final document which has been submitted for our consideration. However, my delegation cannot fail to repeat here the reservations and interpretations formulated by the Holy See at recent United Nations international conferences and which are — let us not forget — an integral part of the reports of those same conferences. I am thinking in particular of the interpretation given to terms such as "reproductive health", "sexual health" and "family planning", which we find once more in the draft document prepared at this session.

The results obtained at Rio — and even more, the commitments made there — make it our duty to protect nature in order to defend humanity. This must be done in a spirit of solidarity, without underestimating the link that exists between ecology, economics and equitable development.

A particular aspect of this problem, and one upon which I wish to insist, is the fate of the 50 million persons in the world who are displaced, in many cases as result of an inadequate environment offering no assurance of human or economic security. Let us not forget them: they have a right to life, to adequate shelter and to a stable food supply.

The Holy See believes that one of the simplest and most efficacious methods through which the insights and resolutions of Rio are becoming a reality is education. From earliest childhood and the beginnings of schooling, parents and teachers, through the atmosphere they create and by their instruction and witness, can teach young people to respect nature and to use its resources wisely. In this way they help them to develop attitudes of acceptance, sharing and giving.

In this very important task, believers are in the front line. They wish to help their fellow men and women go beyond mere respect for nature and a sharing of resources — which are, of course, absolutely necessary — in order to rediscover a sense of awe before the beauty of the natural elements, which can always inspire in us thoughts about the one who is always before us and whose very nature surpasses our own. The *Canticle of the Sun* of Francis of Assisi must surely be

recalled here, or yet again the paradoxical expression of a contemporary author who did not hesitate to speak of "the spiritual power of matter".

In granting me the privilege of being with you, Pope John Paul II wishes to express the confidence he has in each of the world leaders represented here, so that, in his own words spoken in an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on 22 October 1993, we may study these questions

> "with sure ethical convictions, mastery of self, justice and brotherly love".

That we might all follow the path of participation, discussion and perseverance is my dearest wish.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See for his statement.

> *Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, was escorted from the rostrum.*

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Pascal Gayama, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity.

> *Mr. Pascal Gayama, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, was escorted to the rostrum.*

Mr. Gayama (Organization of African Unity) (*interpretation from French*): For mankind joined together around the central theme of our common destiny, the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 marked a crucial moment in history. The shockwave generated at Rio has reached us today as we meet at this special session of the General Assembly. It is as though we are hearing an echo of the "big bang" of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Let me convey to the General Assembly the greetings of the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim. I wish also to assure Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, of our unswerving cooperation in keeping with the spirit of the relations that link our two organizations.

I wish to recall the very important statement made earlier in this session on behalf of Africa by His Excellency Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and current Chairman of the OAU. His message has been an inspiration to us throughout this session.

What remains of the hopes generated five years ago at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development? The enthusiasm produced by the collapse of ideological barriers and the emergence to prominence of civil society, particularly of non-governmental organizations, gave rise to the concept of what we now call the global village, the point of which is to care for the interests of one and all under the banner of liberalism, which is the new ideology par excellence. Have we secured the conditions for the implementation of Agenda 21, or was that document in essence nothing more than a great, generous illusion? That is the central question.

For Africa, the answer to that question will be known only when we weigh the elements of the common African position formulated at Abidjan in November 1991 against the total of the action undertaken since Rio. The two possible approaches to this were either a comprehensive programme for Agenda 21 — the cost of which, as we all know, was estimated to be $600 billion a year — or the more traditional approach observing the laws of the market economy. But in such a critical area can we nowadays place our trust exclusively in market forces without even a minimum of political impetus?

The emphasis that the African common position placed on poverty reduction as one of its main strategic objectives was intended to let solidarity play its role as a driving force in a sustainable development that would combine environmental preservation with the rational use of the planet's limited resources. The idea was to generate, if not a real Marshall Plan for development, at least the partnership required by an increasingly interdependent world.

It was agreed at Rio that the developed countries were to bring the level of their official development assistance to the nominal level of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product and that sufficient resources were to be mobilized by each country and by the international community, including both the public and private sectors, for the survival of our planet Earth.

To appreciate the innovative nature of the outcome of the Rio Conference, it is important to look beyond speeches for the true nature and degree of commitment

demonstrated by all parties in support of the commendable efforts being made by the Commission on Sustainable Development or such agencies as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) — headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya — which is sorely lacking in resources to manage the world's environment programme.

To strengthen UNEP as a specialized agency of the United Nations, with its various regional offices, would send a clear signal that the international community is committed to the management of the environment, thereby increasing acceptance for the idea of a common destiny and partnership, which was the basis for the conclusions of the Rio Conference.

Multilateral cooperation thus has a major role to play in the implementation of Agenda 21. We call for sustained and increased support for institutions such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development; the United Nations Development Programme; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which have invested a great deal of time and effort to win acceptance for the linkage between environment and development, which is essential if the debate on the environment is to have any credibility.

Since Rio, significant progress has been made in the legal area with the adoption of conventions that today form the framework of a new environmental order — the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and, most recently, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, which was adopted in 1994 and entered into force in December 1996.

Africa participated actively in the preparation and negotiations for the Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought, as shown in that Convention's important annex on Africa.

The position of the African States on the Convention to Combat Desertification was made clear recently at the OAU's Harare meeting, at which the OAU Council of Ministers and its Assembly of Heads of State and Government emphasized the importance that Africa attaches to the first conference of the States parties and to the need to devise a regional programme of action for Africa.

The global mechanism of the Convention to Combat Desertification must be given real financial power. This will make it an operational tool that can be used in the field and also generate sufficient resources to support sustainable development projects. Thus endowed with financial resources, the mechanism will be able to play the catalytic role expected of it.

This question is of crucial importance to Africa because it can lay claim to the largest desert in the world and because the consequences of drought affect nearly all the continent. For this reason, a special resolution on emergency measures for Africa was submitted; it was adopted together with the Convention to Combat Desertification.

Despite the definite legal progress that has been made, public opinion in Africa, and certainly in other parts of the world, continues to question whether the measures taken over the past five years are commensurate with the magnitude of the stakes involved in environment and development. Needless to say, we cannot rely on the principle of "laissez-faire", or the global village will find it difficult to map out its battle strategy and develop its plan for the implementation of Agenda 21. While it is true that appropriate technologies to limit environmental degradation and reverse the trend can easily be identified, the fact remains that the connection between environmental degradation and egotistically driven consumption — which, though it serves as an impetus to economic growth, does not apportion properly the resulting benefits — remains to be made, notwithstanding all the fine words to the contrary.

Africa has two challenges to meet in this respect, the first being to exercise greater control over its environment. In that connection, the OAU acceded to the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, adopted in Algiers in 1968, and, in 1991, to the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes within Africa. We are as deeply committed to these two undertakings as we are to the provisions of Agenda 21.

Five years have elapsed since Rio, when the world unanimously decided to devise a responsible way of relating environment to development. This process involves not only a choice but also a new code of ethics. If there is to be a global village, it should not be based exclusively on all-powerful commerce. Short-term

interests must be sacrificed so that together we can shape our future.

The main "raw materials" of the environment are air and water — priceless things. But what price will we have to pay later on to have available the most priceless commodity of all — life on earth?

Let us keep aflame, in all its brilliance and vigour, the torch that we lit in Rio five years ago.

The Acting President: I thank the Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity for his statement.

Mr. Pascal Gayama, Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I give the floor to The Honourable Ieremia Tabai, Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat.

The Honourable Ieremia Tabai, Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Tabai (South Pacific Forum Secretariat): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a short statement on behalf of the members of the South Pacific Forum — comprising 16 independent States in the Pacific — most of whom are not here today.

Like people in other parts of the world, we aspire to better living standards and increased economic opportunities. High on the regional agenda is the need to achieve economic growth and development. But in recent years we have had to face many difficulties, including declining aid flows, erosion of trade preferences and disruptions of export production.

This has forced a fundamental rethinking of economic policy. Many countries of the region are now pursuing major economic reforms aimed at promoting investment and private sector development and making us better able to respond to global economic changes. Support for this process is high on the Forum agenda.

But while we seek economic growth and the development of our narrow resource base, we do so with a firm understanding of and commitment to the principles of sustainable development. We know that sustainable development in the region can be possible only if economic development takes environmental considerations into account. Coming from very small island countries, most of which have the most fragile ecosystems in the world, with some rising only a few feet above sea level, we are keenly aware of the need to give due consideration to the environmental implications of economic policy decisions.

The major environmental issues for the Pacific island countries remain largely unchanged. They have been discussed before in other United Nations-sponsored meetings, but they need to be reemphasized again in the context of this debate reviewing Agenda 21 in order to encourage the international community to continue addressing them in a serious way. These concerns cover many vital issues, not only for ourselves, but also for all nations: the threat of climate change and sea-level rise; pollution from solid wastes and sewerage; the loss of biodiversity; deforestation; and the degradation of the marine environment, including reef resources, to name but a few.

While we do not deny that the first step and the onus of development lie squarely on our own shoulders, there are crucial elements of development that cannot be addressed at the national and subregional levels alone, but require action at the global level as well.

Many of the problems we face have been imported into our region and we have little or no control over them. Global warming, for instance, and the expected rise in sea levels are very real threats to many atoll island States, and if these threats are not quickly and adequately addressed, whole countries, cultures and peoples will simply cease to exist. It is therefore imperative to continue addressing them, recognizing that individual state actions alone will have little impact on this global problem. We must all have a strong commitment to formulating acceptable policies to achieve significant progress towards the goal of lower greenhouse-gas emissions.

Fresh water and the disposal of wastes are also issues of particular concern to our people. Fresh water is a renewable but limited resource and it is generally recognized that there is a global decline in the quality and quantity of fresh-water supplies. Access to fresh water in the Pacific region is often limited and uncertain on both high islands and atolls. The lack of water-resource data for our region further hampers planning and holds back the development of agriculture and tourism.

Inadequate facilities for sanitation and the disposal of other wastes provide additional sources of contamination and pollution, particularly of the marine environment. Most of the Pacific island States have inadequate facilities for dealing with domestic effluence, ship-borne wastes, pesticide disposal and the recycling of items, such as used batteries.

All these serve to emphasize the priorities of fresh water and adequate waste disposal in our consideration of sustainable development and of expanding international support for national and regional attempts to address these issues. Further encouragement should be given by the international community to the integration of regional fresh-water and waste-management programmes and the provision of technical and scientific data to assist in planning and development.

Small island developing States, not only in the Pacific but elsewhere, face other kinds of problems. These come not only from economic and environmental pressures, but also from the world's perception of events in the region. The transportation of nuclear wastes through our region poses a continuing concern. Even if there were low risks of contamination from an accident occurring in our waters, they would nevertheless have an enormous impact on public perception. It is that perception which underlies our economic vulnerability. Just as, in the United Kingdom, the beef industry suffered from the perception of the dangers of mad cow disease, we too would find that no one would eat our fish out of fear of contamination, which would destroy our major resource.

While we recognize that some progress has been achieved in implementing Agenda 21 and the commitments made in Rio, there is no denying that many issues, such as the ones I have outlined, are yet to be adequately addressed. For us in the South Pacific, sustainable development remains a particular concern. As referred to earlier, many island countries and territories have fragile environments and small land areas, and rely on their natural resources or ability to attract tourists for a significant part of their national income. This makes it imperative that economic development and environmental policies be mutually integrated and supportive, not only for the sake of our region, but for the rest of the world.

I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the Rio agreements and principles and to seeking practical expressions of partnership with others to achieve these objectives. We are optimistic that, with national and international action and mutual support, we can achieve our aim of advancing the present without compromising the future.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat for his statement.

The Honourable Ieremia Tabai, Secretary-General of the South Pacific Forum Secretariat, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker on the list is Mr. Collin Marake Matjila, of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities, speaking on behalf of the Local Authorities' Major Group.

Mr. Collin Marake Matjila, of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Matjila (International Union of Local Authorities): It is a great honour to be addressing the Assembly today on behalf of the world community of local government and, in particular, on behalf of the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC) and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI).

The relationship between local government and the United Nations community has come a long way since the Earth Summit in 1992. Members will recall that, on the occasion of that historic event, the debate about our common future was often polarized into the choice between rural sustainability and urban migration, between the green agenda and the brown agenda, between developed and developing economies. In these debates, the roles and concerns of local government were not recognized.

Indeed, while we applaud the recognition granted to local government in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, the two pages in that Chapter hardly reflect the immense financial, infrastructure, administrative and governmental contribution of local Governments to the green and brown agendas or to the agendas of the North and South. In key areas such as waste and water, where Governments and the private sector rely heavily on local government for their day-to-day viability, little attention was paid to local government. Despite this, we joined forces and adopted Agenda 21 as our agenda for action.

Since 1992 more than 2,000 local governments in over 64 countries have begun to work with their communities to implement every aspect of Agenda 21. We in local government are proud to have led one of the indisputably significant follow-up efforts to the Rio Summit.

Through the participatory planning process of local Agenda 21 programmes, hundreds of local governments have reorganized their operations to better advance sustainable development. We have worked to involve all sectors of our communities as partners, including women and youth.

Greater Johannesburg has been very successful in aligning its local Agenda 21 with its development processes, which has in turn been institutionalized within the legal framework, and it has organized sustainable urban environmental management by integrating it into the overall functioning of local government.

Local governments have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in waste management, waste-water treatment, public transport, clean fuels and energy efficiency, public health, settlement upgrading, housing and habitat protection and many other areas. One example is the action being taken by close to 1,000 local governments to implement the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Protecting the global climate was not seen as a traditional local responsibility. Nonetheless, local governments have been the first to set and achieve concrete targets for greenhouse-gas emission reductions.

In 1988 the city government of Toronto, Canada, became the first to adopt a carbon-dioxide reduction target of 20 per cent by 2010. A 1996 assessment of Toronto's emissions revealed a three per cent reduction from 1988 levels. Our lesson is clear: governments can set targets, and targets can be achieved.

All of these local actions have engendered a greater recognition in the international community of the role of local government. We believe that this recognition will make future efforts all the more concrete and successful.

National Governments and local governments shared the path to the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlement (Habitat II). On that occasion, local governments were invited for the first time in the history of the United Nations to participate actively in the deliberations of a major United Nations conference. Today we urge the Member States and the Secretary-General of the United Nations to build upon that precedent.

Local governments, with their democratic legitimacy and public responsibilities, are distinct from the non-governmental-organization sector. The worldwide community of local government, through its representative structure, the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities, is ready to build a more effective partnership with the United Nations on the basis of this reality. Let us go forward as we enter the new millennium.

Since 1992 numerous countries have chosen to prepare themselves for the new century by enhancing the status and capacity of local government. More than 70 countries are now engaged in a formal process of decentralization. This is a global trend that reflects the global reality of cooperative governance. In this context, I would like to note the recognition and status accorded to local government in the South African Constitution. This recognition and status are viewed by many international experts as a model for the world.

Our experience indicates that for continued success the following three elements are important: first, United Nations recognition and support for local government as a full Agenda 21 partner; secondly, responsible national decentralization, cooperation and partnership with local government to implement Agenda 21; and, thirdly, sustained local government action in partnership with women, youth and other sectors of local communities.

Therefore, on the occasion of this five-year review of Agenda 21, I would like to close by highlighting some key issues of concern to the functioning of this partnership.

First, we urge the United Nations to find ways to institutionalize the recognition and involvement of local government in its deliberations.

Secondly, we urge the international community to ensure that local Agenda 21 programmes and similar sustainable-development efforts are protected under international trade agreements. We would welcome international investors to support the implementation of our local Agenda 21 programmes.

Thirdly, we support the proposals made by numerous Governments at this week's meetings to review subsidies and to identify economic instruments that could

contribute to sustainable development. We pledge to participate in such a review.

Local government recently completed its own five-year review of Agenda 21 at the Pathways to Sustainability conference held in Newcastle, Australia. The resulting Newcastle Declaration indicates that although the promise of Rio has not been realized, some progress has been made.

I believe that, with the further assistance and cooperation of the United Nations and the international community, by the year 2002 our successes will be more visible in the daily lives of people. Our dream for a better life for all people, wherever they live, can be realized.

The Acting President: I thank the representative of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities for his statement.

Mr. Collin Marake Matjila of the World Executive of the International Union of Local Authorities was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is Ms. Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council, speaking on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group.

Ms. Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council was escorted to the rostrum.

Ms. Carmen (International Indian Treaty Council): On behalf of the International Indian Treaty Council and indigenous peoples, I offer my heart and hand in respectful greeting to all gathered here today at this special session of the General Assembly, the Earth Summit + 5.

In 1992 the Governments and the peoples of the world reached the historic agreement known as Agenda 21, recognizing that the protection and sustainability of the rapidly diminishing diversity of life on Earth required an immediate, unified, international response.

Indigenous peoples have always been at the forefront of this struggle to protect the sacred, interconnected web of life that we are now calling biological diversity. We uphold the traditional indigenous perspective that the mental, physical, social and spiritual well-being of our peoples and the survival of our future generations cannot be separated from the health of our environment, the practice of our cultures and religions and the expression of our inherent right to self-determination.

A critical component of both Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity is the commitment by the States parties to work in full partnership with indigenous peoples regarding any development involving our natural resources and cultural knowledge, while recognizing our unique expertise and relationship to the Earth through the sustainable-development practices we have utilized since time immemorial. That this promised partnership has not become a reality does not diminish the importance of the commitment or of the unmet challenges it presents to State Governments.

Unabated non-sustainable resource extraction and contamination having an impact on indigenous peoples have accelerated over the five years since the Rio Earth Summit. In the vast majority of cases, the affected peoples have not been consulted, and much less have they given their agreement, despite Agenda 21's promise. Examples include the dumping of toxic and radioactive wastes on land and in oceans, the discharge of persistent organic pollutants into the food chain, rampant deforestation, expanding militarism and weapons testing, hydroelectric dam projects, the commercial overharvesting of fish, open-pit mining and oil drilling.

We thank the President of the General Assembly for his statement to the high-level segment of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in April in which he recognized that mining can never be sustainable and remains one of the most unsustainable practices that threatens communities and the environment.

The profound devastation caused by mining and drilling is far too pervasive to catalogue. A few of the innumerable examples include the Pegasus cyanide heap-leach gold mine in Montana, which is adjacent to Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribal territories, the massive Black Mesa coal mine on lands sacred to the Dineh and Hopi peoples in Big Mountain, Arizona, the extreme levels of contamination caused by Shell Oil on Ogoni traditional lands in Nigeria, and the gold-mining and uranium-drilling in the sacred Black Hills in violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty between the Lakota Nation and the United States.

Yet the devastating effects of mining and oil drilling were not addressed in Agenda 21. The Commission on Sustainable Development should immediately move to

rectify this omission, in full partnership with indigenous peoples.

The 1990 United Nations Global Consultation on the Realization of the Right to Development as a Human Right underlined that the most destructive and prevalent abuses of indigenous rights are the direct consequences of development strategies that fail to respect the fundamental right of self-determination. The provisions of Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity will never result in economic or political gains that are sustainable over time if they fail to recognize the fundamental rights of development and self-determination, as well as the full territorial and cultural rights of indigenous peoples.

Pending this recognition, the Convention on Biological Diversity's reference in article 8 (j) to the sharing of benefits resulting from the development of plant resources and the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples is inevitably an open invitation to commercial exploitation and appropriation.

Agenda 21 emphasized that:

> "Indigenous people and their communities shall enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance or discrimination." *(A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol.1), chap. 26, para. 26.1)*

We therefore urge the Earth Summit + 5 to underscore this commitment by calling for the adoption of the present text of the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as adopted by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities as an essential component for the full implementation of Agenda 21.

Indigenous peoples have called for an international moratorium on the patenting of life forms and expressed vehement opposition to making life a commodity through what is called "biological prospecting", including the marketing by pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies of animal and human genetic and cell materials and of plants used for food, medicinal and religious purposes by indigenous peoples since time immemorial, such as quinoa.

Western intellectual property-rights systems and international trade agreements being codified globally through the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Trade Organization's trade-related intellectual property rights, as well as regional trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, defy basic principles that emerged from the first Earth Summit and contain no provisions for safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples see a grave danger in putting the world's food supplies in the hands of companies intent on producing profitable new bio-engineered strains while unsustainable practices are reducing the variety of plant and animal species found in their natural habitats.

Indigenous peoples have consistently expressed opposition to the Human Genome Diversity Project and the harvesting and patenting without consent of our ancestral genetic heritage by multinational corporations as well as governmental institutions. The use and exploitation of human genetic materials and human cell lines are not directly addressed in the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is seen by indigenous peoples as another grave omission that limits its potential to monitor and oversee the total range of "bioprospecting" activities having an impact on indigenous peoples.

Another critical weakness of Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity is the lack of effective mechanisms to oversee and control the impacts of globalization, including the activities of multinational corporations, international financial institutions, multinational military operations, the multilateral investment agreement and international trade-agreement bodies. The indigenous Caucus at the recent fifth session of the CSD called for comprehensive impact reports on the actions of Governments and multinational corporations and their effects on indigenous peoples with regard to issues of non-sustainable resource extraction and biological prospecting, a proposal which the General Assembly should underscore and the CSD immediately implement.

We also call upon the General Assembly to support the adoption without delay of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples within the United Nations system, which could serve as a forum for overseeing and investigating these types of abuses and play an effective role in preventing deadly conflicts arising from the opposition of indigenous peoples to impose development within their territories. The fully informed and effective participation of indigenous peoples in all aspects of the discussions, decisions and forums originating from the Rio Earth Summit must be ensured if the promise of partnership is ever to become a reality. Therefore, the

international Indian Treaty Council and indigenous peoples propose that a working group of indigenous peoples be formally instituted at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1998.

Our organization also commends the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity for hiring an indigenous person, as recommended at the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be active in the dissemination of information and inclusion of greater numbers of indigenous peoples in this process.

The monumental responsibility this Assembly holds in its hands requires the recognition that human beings are not only actors upon and developers of the natural world, but are an integral part of the Earth's biological diversity. The natural world is not a commodity. The natural world, the Earth, is our mother, providing all that we eat, drink, breathe and use in our daily lives. The diverse forms of life on this Earth depend upon us to protect their survival, not as potential products to be exploited but as living things with an intrinsic value and a place in the sacred web of life that cannot be jeopardized without risk to our own place, our own human existence. Please think about the lives of your own grandchildren as you consider the choices before you today.

My prayers are with this Assembly and all my relations.

The Acting President: I thank the Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council for her statement.

Ms. Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council, was escorted from the rostrum.

Programme of work

The Acting President: Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to inform members that it will be necessary to hold one further plenary meeting of the General Assembly after the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Nineteenth Special Session has completed its work and the relevant documents are available to the Assembly.

May I therefore take it that the Assembly authorizes the President to convene one more plenary meeting on the understanding that it will take place upon completion of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The next plenary meeting will take place at 9 p.m. tonight, provided that the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole has completed its work.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.